United Nations ST/AI/2010/7

Secretariat

1 June 2010

Administrative instruction

Competitive examination for recruitment to the Professional category of staff members from other categories

The Under-Secretary-General for Management, pursuant to section 4.2 of Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2009/4, and for the purpose of defining the conditions under which staff members in the General Service and related categories may take competitive examinations for recruitment to the Professional category, promulgates the following:

Section 1
General provisions

Competitive examinations are held annually in particular occupational groups for recruitment to the Professional category, in accordance with the needs of the Organization. Specific arrangements for such examinations shall be announced through information circulars, which shall be issued at least three months in advance of the upcoming examinations. Competitive examinations for recruitment and placement in posts requiring specific language skills in the Professional category are not governed by the present instruction.

Section 2
Selection of occupational groups and total number of recruitments per year

2.1 The Office of Human Resources Management will conduct a workforce planning exercise in order to establish the occupational groups at the Professional level (P-1 and P-2) for which examinations will be needed, and the projected vacancies in those groups. The selected occupational groups will be the same as for the national competitive recruitment examinations.

2.2 The total number of posts subject to geographical distribution which can be filled in a given year by successful candidates from this examination will be up to 10 per cent of the number of staff, other than language staff, recruited during the previous calendar year at the junior Professional level (P-1 and P-2) after passing a competitive examination.

2.3 In addition, up to seven recruitments can be made against vacant professional posts not subject to geographical distribution, other than language posts, and up to three recruitments in duty stations with chronically high vacancy rates, supported by evidence that no successful candidates from the national competitive recruitment

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examinations are available as certified by the Office of Human Resources Management.

Section 3
Eligibility

3.1 A staff member serving in the General Service and related categories, including the Field Service category up to and including the FS-5 level, may apply to take a competitive examination in a particular occupational group, provided that he or she:

(a) Has a minimum of five years of continuous service in the Secretariat, excluding any service in separately administered funds or programmes, except as otherwise provided in section 3.2 below;

(b) Has a rating of at least "fully meets performance expectations" or "fully successful performance" in his or her last two performance assessments;

(c) Holds a United Nations appointment valid until at least six months after the date when the written examination is scheduled to take place;

(d) Meets the minimum educational criteria set out in sections 3.4 and 3.5 of the present instruction.

3.2 Short breaks in service of not more than six months may be allowed, at the discretion of the Central Examinations Board. Staff members who had previously served continuously for at least five years with the Secretariat, had resigned and, by 31 December of the calendar year of the examination, would have served continuously for at least three years since their reappointment will also be considered eligible, provided that they meet the other requirements.

3.3 National Professional Officers are not eligible to take this examination since they are performing functions in the Professional category, but may take the national competitive recruitment examination as external applicants.[1]

Minimum educational criteria

3.4 Staff members are invited to apply for one of the occupational groups in which the examination is to be held in a given year. The minimum eligibility criterion is a three-year first-level university degree conferred on the applicant, broadly related to the occupational group for which the applicant has applied in a given year.[2] Staff members who have a degree or degrees broadly related to two occupational groups offered in a given year may apply to take the examination in each of the two occupational groups. Examples of acceptable university degrees for specific occupational groups shall be provided in the information circular announcing the upcoming examinations.

3.5 Staff members who had served in the Secretariat for at least five years by 31 December 1989 will be allowed to take the examination in any one of the occupational groups in which the examination is held in a given year upon providing

[1] See administrative instruction ST/AI/2010/8, entitled "Conditions under which individuals may take the national competitive recruitment examinations".

[2] An associate degree or equivalent will not be considered as meeting the requirements under section 3.

evidence of post-secondary academic qualifications. Should such staff members hold a first-level university degree or degrees broadly related to the occupational groups offered in a given year, they may apply to take the examination in the second occupational group to which their degree is broadly related.

Additional eligibility criteria for examination repeaters

3.6 In addition to the minimum eligibility criteria stipulated above, staff members who have sat for previous competitive examinations must have achieved a mark of at least 30 per cent in the overall written portion of the previous examination in the occupational group or groups for which they are applying. In cases in which the staff member did not obtain a mark of at least 30 per cent, the staff member should submit to the Central Examinations Board tangible proof, in detail, of his or her preparation for the new examination (e.g., official transcripts demonstrating relevant university-level courses successfully completed, detailed summary of relevant materials used for study, detailed description of the nature and duration of relevant field work). Failure to submit such evidence will result in the staff member's ineligibility to sit for the new examination.

3.7 The Central Examinations Board will determine the eligibility of all applicants in consultation with the Office of Human Resources Management. Staff members shall provide relevant documents, as required, as evidence in support of their meeting the minimum eligibility criteria described in this section.

3.8 Staff members who have been found ineligible by the Central Examinations Board to sit the examination will be informed of the reason for that decision. Staff members who have cause to believe that they have been unfairly excluded from participating in the examination may appeal to the Board for review. Such appeals must be received by the Board at Headquarters within 10 working days of the receipt of notification of rejection. In order to meet the deadline, applicants serving at offices away from Headquarters must submit their appeal to the Chair of the Board by fax or e-mail.

Section 4
Applications

Staff members who wish to submit an application shall complete the appropriate application form annexed to the information circular announcing the upcoming examinations and submit it with all required documentation to the Central Examinations Board by the deadline indicated in the information circular.

Section 5
Format and substance of the examination

5.1 The examination will take into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of the United Nations.

(a) *Written examination (80 per cent of the marks)*. The written examination consists of (i) a specialized paper which tests the substantive knowledge of the particular occupation for which the examinee is being tested and (ii) a general paper which tests drafting skills;

(b) *Oral examination (20 per cent of the marks)*. The oral examination consists of an interview with the examinee, who will be asked questions designed to

ascertain whether he or she possesses the United Nations core values and competencies necessary for positions in the relevant occupational group or groups and to test his or her general knowledge of international affairs.

5.2 All written and oral examinations normally follow a similar format in all occupational groups and are consistent with the format of the national competitive recruitment examination.

5.3 The written examination for all occupational groups is administered simultaneously at all duty stations. Applicants who have been accepted for two occupational groups will be required to complete the examination papers on the same day. Eligible applicants will be informed in writing of the exact date, time and location of the written examination.

5.4 On the basis of performance in the written examination, the Board of Examiners will invite successful examinees to an oral examination. The same performance standard will be used for inviting candidates to the oral examination for the national competitive recruitment examination and for the competitive examination for recruitment to the Professional category of staff members from other categories.

5.5 Additional information on the format of the examination will be included in the separate information circular announcing the upcoming examinations. Sample papers, as well as lists of topics that may be helpful in preparing for the examination, will be made available at all duty stations by means of the United Nations Intranet.

Language of the examination

5.6 In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 35/210 of 17 December 1980 and 37/235 D of 21 December 1982, the examination can be taken in any of the six official languages of the United Nations (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish), with due regard to the requisite proficiency in one of the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat. Consequently, the general paper of the written examination should be taken in either English or French and the specialized paper can be taken in any of the United Nations official languages. The oral examination must be taken in either English or French.

Section 6
Central Examinations Board

6.1 The Central Examinations Board is composed of five members appointed by the Secretary-General: a chair selected from among staff serving at Headquarters, with the concurrence of the representatives of the staff; two members nominated by the representatives of the staff, one of whom will be from a duty station away from Headquarters; and two members nominated by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management, one of whom will be from a third duty station. The Central Examinations Board will have a non-voting ex officio member representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management and a secretary. The Secretary-General will also appoint alternates to all of these positions.

6.2 The Central Examinations Board has the following responsibilities:

(a) To oversee the examination procedures and arrangements;

(b) To screen all applications and determine the eligibility of applicants to sit the examination;

(c) To review applicants' appeals and complaints regarding the examination process;

(d) To review and decide upon recommendations made by the boards of examiners, especially on the arrangements for the marking of papers; recommendations on which examinees are to be convoked to the oral examination, based on results of the written examination; and recommendations on the minimum professional standards required for recruitment, and to establish the final ranking of candidates;

(e) To take note of the information submitted to it by the Office of Human Resources Management on the recruitment of successful candidates in each calendar year;

(f) To recommend to the Secretary-General possible improvements for future examinations.

6.3 Staff members who have complaints with respect to the procedures and arrangements for the examination should contact the Secretary of the Central Examinations Board in writing within 10 working days of the event that gave rise to the complaint. The established practice of the Board is to review such complaints within a reasonable time after receipt.

Section 7
Boards of examiners

7.1 Boards of examiners will be appointed by the Secretary-General. Each board will consist of a chair elected by the members of the board, normally at least two members nominated by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management and an equal number of members nominated by the representatives of the staff. Each board will have a non-voting ex officio member representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management. Nominations from both the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management and the representatives of the staff must be received prior to the date of the written examination. In the absence of nominees from either party, the Board will be formed and will start its work with the names received prior to the examination date.

7.2 Boards of examiners will normally be composed of staff members of the Secretariat; however, staff members of the specialized agencies or outside experts may also be included if so agreed between representatives of the Secretary-General and representatives of the staff.

7.3 Under the overall responsibility of the Central Examinations Board, boards of examiners have the following responsibilities:

(a) To mark the written examination. A board of examiners will be established to mark the specialized paper of the written examination, and another board of examiners will be established to mark the general paper of the written examination;

(b) To report to the Central Examinations Board the results of the written examination;

(c) To recommend to the Central Examinations Board the minimum standard required in the written and oral parts of the examination;

(d) To recommend to the Central Examinations Board a list of examinees (who are not identified by name), in ranking order, to be convoked to the oral examination for each occupational group, based on the results of the written examination;

(e) To conduct and mark the oral examination;

(f) To recommend to the Central Examinations Board the final ranking of examinees (who are not identified by name) by occupational group, based on the total of the combined results of the written and oral examinations.

Section 8
Informing examinees of results

8.1 The Examinations and Tests Section of the Office of Human Resources Management will, upon completion of the examination, communicate in writing to all examinees their ranking in the written examination and whether they have achieved a mark of 30 per cent or higher in the overall written part of the examination. Examinees who have taken the oral examination will also be notified of their ranking in that part of the examination.

8.2 The candidates for each occupational group will be ranked on the basis of their combined scores in the written and oral examinations. Taking into account the level of difficulty of the examination, the boards of examiners will make recommendations to the Central Examinations Board as to the level above which the candidates will be considered to be qualified to perform at the junior Professional level. Both the national competitive recruitment examination and the competitive examination for recruitment to the Professional category of staff members from other categories will follow the same performance standards. The recommendations concerning the qualification of candidates to perform at the junior Professional level and the final ranking will be made confidentially, with full respect for anonymity.

8.3 The Central Examinations Board will make the final recommendation to the Secretary-General with regard to the inclusion of successful candidates on the roster. Candidates will be informed of their results upon approval of the roster by the Secretary-General.

Section 9
Establishment of the roster and recruitment of successful candidates

9.1 Candidates successful in the examination will be placed on a roster from which programme managers may select candidates to fill positions at the P-2 level in the Organization. Candidates will remain on the roster until they are selected for a position.

9.2 In a given calendar year, the total number of recruitments may not exceed the numbers indicated in section 2 above.

9.3 When a candidate from the roster from this examination is selected to fill a vacancy, and the Office of Human Resources Management approves the selection, the filling of the vacancy will count towards one of the categories indicated in section 2 (against the 10 per cent quota if it is a regular budget post, against

recruitments for Professional posts not subject to geographical distribution, other than language posts, or against recruitments for duty stations with chronically high vacancy rates). The Office of Human Resources Management is responsible for monitoring the number of appointments in all categories of posts and for reporting the total number of candidates selected under each of the categories indicated above to the Central Examinations Board as soon as the number is reached.

9.4 In the event that, within an occupational group, no candidates have been recruited by 1 January of the second year after completion of the examination, the first-ranked candidate in that occupation will be automatically assigned by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management to the first vacant post, within the same occupational group, that becomes available in that year.

9.5 Successful candidates will normally be expected to serve at least two years in their new post.

9.6 Candidates who do not wish to be assigned to the post or posts available to them will be kept on the roster. Upon the receipt of a second rejection of a formal offer, his or her name will be removed from the roster.

9.7 All successful candidates will be recommended for recruitment at the junior Professional level.

9.8 The names of the successful candidates recruited will appear on iSeek. The effective date of recruitment of the successful candidates will be the first day of the month in which they assume the functions of the post for which they have been selected.

Section 10
Final provisions

10.1 The present instruction shall enter into force on the date of its issuance.

10.2 The provisions for recruitment set out in section 9 will be subject to review after two years of implementation. Should the total number of recruitments of successful candidates be lower than the 10 per cent limit approved by the General Assembly for two consecutive years, the placement process described in the present instruction will be reviewed.

10.3. Administrative instructions ST/AI/2003/7, entitled "Competitive examination for recruitment to the Professional category of staff members from other categories", and ST/AI/2005/9, its amendment, are hereby abolished.

(*Signed*) Angela **Kane**
Under-Secretary-General for Management